

GATARI JI AMONG THE YEGA

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Introduction

This article describes the local traditional music of the Yega tribe in Oro Province. The Yega people have adopted music from all over the country (like Kiwai, Sia, Dobu, Baruga, Buari ya, Gauma, and Geve), which was not originally from the Yega tribe. However, I will deal specifically with *Gatari Ji*, because it shows the true identity of the Yega.

The Yega people speak the Ewa ge dialect, in which the word *Gatari Ji* emerges. *Gatari* means “voice out” and *Ji* means “cry”. The *Gatari Ji* has two parts, the primary form and the adjusted form.

The Yega musician uses the tune of the primary and the adjusted *Gatari Ji* to compose religious chants. Traditionally, some were dedicated to the deities, as well as to the supreme spirit, known as *Sirorari*. The word *Sirorari* derives from the word *Siroro*, meaning “creation”. The practical worship of *Sirorari* by the Yega tribe, and the neighbouring villages, led the Yega people to adopt some chants belonging to the neighbouring villages, which were dedicated to *Sirorari*, because they all have one common belief.

The primary form of *Gatari Ji*

Crying is an outward sign of a person in sorrow. It is natural and worldwide. Focusing, in particular, on the Yega tribe, and the *Gatari Ji*, this crying develops into the form of

a chant. The utterance is traditional, common, and it expresses, descriptively, a person's core feelings.

This mostly occurs after a death. The Yega mourners sit around and weep, while some stand to hug and dance. The two rites differ, but the tune of *Gatari*¹ remains the same, because the form of the tune is fixed in the mentality of every old and young Yega person. Actually, the real crying follows after the utterance of the chant. So, the combination of the chant uttered, and the real crying, is known as *Gatari Ji*.

At the death scene, musicians do their part to record, in memory, the words uttered. After the occasion, at leisure time, the chant is sung repeatedly to make it firm, so that everyone learns it by heart, and sings it for himself or herself, as well as for remembrance.

Henry Kombega's death in 1984, at Isivini, brought many relatives together to share their sorrow. At that time, an old man, Colin Ijivi, uttered a chant while crying:

O poio ari o ritari vitido poio ari o
O ritari vitido poio ari
*O pikide rare eriri*².

Which means:

Migrated boy grew up, was migrated
Boy migrated and grew up
Wasn't a right time to depart, but departed.

Apart from the occasion of death, during hunting, fishing, gardening, and on their own, the villages compose their own chants, using the same tune as the original *Gatari Ji*, describing the particular situation. Although the composition may now contain remembrance, happiness, petition, and praise, the Yega people continue to call it

Gatari Ji, because the idea still originates from the act of crying.

Below, is an example of a chant of happiness chanted by Yauweri, when he was on his brother's hunting track, very early in the morning. The tune is adapted from the original *Gatari Ji*, because it was, and remains, the only surviving ancient tune.

O Jojae torido mama iba bojari o tenoda
*O Roedo gido rojedo mama iba bojari o tenoda.*³

Which means:

Before dawn, off for hunting
why follow the path by breaking saplings.

Adjusted *Gatari Ji*

The adjusted form of the *Gatari Ji* has many different tunes, because many musicians, with many different ideas, make their own adjustments. However, all adjusted chants sound similar, so that they can be easily identified by newcomers. They differ slightly from the original chants, because the adjusted ones can be led by either one or two leaders. The practice of individuals leading a chant is called *yabe*.⁴ The adjusted form is also arranged to include a part that can be danced to.

The musicians pick up the primary form of *Gatari Ji* at the death scene, or elsewhere, and adjust it in their own time. They then popularise it during feasting. The new version becomes ceremonial music, that any group or clan can use at times of happiness, such as marriage, initiation, etc.

The adjusted form is accompanied by instruments, consisting of kundu drums, conch shell, and rattles.⁵ All of which sound and beat at the same time. The warning beat

starts in a way that tells the participants that the next song is about to start. This is called *Jogota*. A leader chants the first half of the adjusted *Gatari Ji*, then the group takes over, to chant the second half. As soon as the group finishes, the beat of *Jogota* starts again. The sequence is repeated until the *Jogota* ends it.

Most of the chants have only one verse, and, during each chanting of the verse, one or two words are changed by the leader.

Here is one example of an adjusted chant with one *Yabe*.

LEADER:

O Bega re kundo bugera giwo
O Itadi sedo bugera giwo.

GROUP:

O oro tepoda yeira toriwo oro o oro orokaiva
*oro.*⁶

Which means:

LEADER:

We bring you peace
to give it to you.

FIRST LEADER GROUP:

Welcome, this is the place of peace, welcome,
welcome.

The other form of the adjusted *Gatari Ji* is led by two leaders. The first leader chants the first *Yabe*, the second leader chants the second *Yabe*, and finally the group joins in. This means that three separate vocalists, or groups, participate in one chant.

Here is one example of an adjusted *Gatari Ji*, with two *Yabe*.

FIRST LEADER:

O Esega o bugudo pira o.

SECOND LEADER:

O Baiyau o kumbudo pira o.

GROUP:

*O Toriwo oro kaiva oro.*⁷

Which means:

FIRST LEADER:

A visitor is coming

SECOND LEADER:

He is bringing treasure

GROUP:

Come in, welcome, welcome.

Local Traditional Religious Chants

In all aspects of the relation to the deity, the ancestors of the Yega tribe assumed supernatural power, and they were classified under the existence of the spiritual world. Special chants were composed, and dedicated to the deities, having in mind, that all blessings would flow their way in hunting, fishing, and gardening.

In the midst of this polytheism, a belief in a supreme spirit also existed. This supreme spirit was known as *Sirorari*.⁸ *Sirorari* was understood to have power over the material and spiritual world. This understanding motivated the Yega ancestors to offer sacrifice in a primitive way, in terms of food and prayers.

The dedication of chants to the deities was common. The composers had to compose a tune that would make the deities happy. Some used the tune of the original tune, or the adjusted *Gatari Ji*, and some used a monotone. All these tunes were thought to be acceptable to the spiritual beings (they could be heard quickly, for swift blessings).

Here is one example: Uareba Kombega, from Kanauje village, using a chant for hunting. It was a chant of petition, sung monotonously, so that edible animals would come his way. Although the chant had no mention of the specific hunting god, the idea remained that his hunting would be blessed.

*Wo, wo, wo – O Undari wo budo dogedo itio
rejeddo bane – wo, wo, wo.*⁹

Which means:

*Animal, animal – Give me the tamed animal
and I will easily catch it, animal, animal.*

Another of the Uareba Kombega's monotonous chants, used before planting in the garden, was addressed to the supreme spirit *Sirorari*. This was chanted to the tune of the original *Gatari Ji*.

1. *O Siroro ari embo iso poiwo mei rare
be ba itigae gowedo bane iso itari gido.*
2. *Natopo asisi iso ikowegari mei
itigae tano tigare iso itari gido.*¹⁰

Which means:

1. *Self-created man, I am your fatherless child
help me to plant and harvest the taro, because it
is your gift.*

2. *Everlasting spirit, for your lost son
give more than enough, because it is your gift.*

Apart from the Yega circuit, the neighbouring villages also held the same belief in the supreme spirit *Sirorari*. This allowed the Yega people to exchange chants. The Yega people also composed new chants, using tunes from neighbouring villages.

Here is one example of a chant that was adopted from the neighbouring villages, because of the common belief in *Sirorari*.

*O Siroro bemire e ai
E maiama yowa siroro, siroro
O siroro bemire e ae.*¹¹

Which means:

*The truth about creation
The continuous creation of the pearl
The truth about creation.*

Chanting in Church Worship

The pioneer missionaries introduced the worship of the Christian God in the midst of this polytheism, and, in time, supplanted the traditional religious worship. The Yega people lost their traditional religious identity, in terms of belief and chants dedicated to many deities, as well as to *Sirorari*. However, a very few remained, that the old people taught to the new generation, who brought them forward into the structure of the church.

Bishop George Ambo, having in mind for the church to move towards indigeneity, introduced traditional instruments, customary dress, and dancing into church worship in the early 1960s. This helped the Yega people understand Christ, in their midst, and in the *Gatari Ji*. Many

Yega musicians composed chants in the form, and the tune, of the original, or adjusted, *Gatari Ji*, and the adopted chants, using Christian ideology. All these chants were accompanied by instruments.

Here is one example of a chant composed to the tune of the original *Gatari Ji*. The tune remains, but the adjustment is designed to be chanted by two *Yabe*.

FIRST LEADER:

O Bejeio nango gore o.

SECOND LEADER:

O Keriso da buari o.

GROUP:

Keriso da buari o bejeio nango gore o.

Which means:

FIRST LEADER:

Speak out for us to hear.

SECOND LEADER:

The coming of Christ.

GROUP:

The coming of Christ, speak out for us to hear.

The *Sirorari* chants, adopted from the neighbouring tribes and villages, were also brought into church worship, but the words were slightly changed to focus on Christ. For example, the chant *siroro bemire*, was rearranged for Holy Communion.

O Siroro ge bemisi rare ingio

O Asisi bondo re siro siroro rare

O Siroro ge bemisi rare ingio.

Which means

*Hear the tune creative message
The spiritual feasting is creative
Hear the tune, creative message.*

Conclusion

The primary form of the *Gatari Ji* emerges from a person in sorrow. This form is then adjusted by musicians, so that a leader chants the first part, and the group chants the second part. Some musicians go far as to adjust it so that three parts are chanted separately.

The church within the Yega circuit has already adopted three forms of the *Gatari Ji*, but it could move deeper into indigenity, by using *Sirorari* chants in their original form, without rearrangement.

The three parts of the *Gatari Ji* can be theologised as the Trinity. Thus the *Gatari Ji* could be as symbol of the Trinity in the music of the Yega tribe.

NOTES

¹ A descriptive chant before the crying.

² I was present at the time, and learned it by heart.

³ Hayward Kombega explained to me, in 1987, at Isivini, how his uncle, Yauweri, composed the chant.

⁴ *Yabe* derives from the word *Ya*, meaning “song”, and *be*, meaning “mouth”. The leading part is a chant called *Yabe*.

⁵ Kundu drums and conch shell are common through out PNG. Rattles are small nuts taken from a tree known as Bua in the Ewa dialect.

⁶ This was adjusted and rearranged by Gordon Gill Tangara, from an unknown surviving oral source in 1986.

⁷ My own chant, but I had to adjust it again to welcome Bishop Swing into Newton Theological College in 1987.

⁸ *Sirorari* generally means “creator”. It is a common belief among the people of the Killeton and the North Coast area.

⁹ This was explained to me by Hayward Kombega, when I interviewed him in 1987 at Isivini.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Adopted chant from the North Coast area called Kasamba.